STORY OF THE DEAD PEOPLE

Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) says:

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُواْ مِن دِيَرِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ فَقَالَ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ مُوتُواْ ثُمَّ أَحْيَـهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَـكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لاَ يَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Did you (O Muhammad) not think of those who went forth from their homes in the thousands, fearing death Allah said to them, "Die". And then He restored them to life. Truly, Allah is full of bounty to mankind, but most men thank not.
(Surah Al Baqarah 2:243)

Ibn Abu Hatim related that Ibn `Abbas (رضي الله عنه) said that these people mentioned herein, were the residents of a village called Dawardan. `Ali ibn `Asim said that they were from Dawardan, a village several miles away from Wasit (in Iraq).

In his Tafsir, Waki` ibn Jarrah said that Ibn `Abbas (رضي الله عنه) commented,

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُواْ مِن دِيَرِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ﴾

(Did you {O Muhammad} not think of those who went forth from their homes in thousands, fearing death)

that they were four thousand persons who escaped the plague (that broke out in their land). They said, "We should go to a land that is free of death!" When they reached a certain area, Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) said to them:

﴿مُوتُواْ﴾

("Die.")

and they all died. Afterwards, one of the Prophets passed by them and supplicated to Allah to resurrect them and Allah brought them back to life.

So, Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) stated:

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُواْ مِن دِيَرِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ﴾

(Did you {O Muhammad} not think of those who went forth from their homes in the thousands, fearing death)

Furthermore, several scholars among the Salaf said that these people were the residents of a city during the time of the Children of Israel. The weather in their land did not suit them and an epidemic broke out. They fled their land fearing death and took refuge in the wilderness. They later arrived at a fertile valley and they filled what is between its two sides.

Then Allah sent two angels to them, one from the lower side and the other from the upper side of the valley. The angels screamed once and all the people died instantly, just as the death of one man. They were later moved to a different place, where walls and graves were built around them. They all perished, and their bodies rotted and disintegrated.

Long afterwards, one of the Prophets of the Children of Israel, whose name was Hizqil (Ezekiel), passed by them and asked Allah to bring them back to life by his hand.

Allah accepted his supplication and commanded him to say, "O rotted bones, Allah commands you to come together." The bones of everybody were brought together.

Allah then commanded him to say, "O bones, Allah commands you to be covered with flesh, nerves and skin." That also happened while Hizqil was watching.

Allah then commanded him to say, "O souls, Allah commands you to return, each to the body that it used to inhabit." They all came back to life, looked around and proclaimed, "All praise is due to You (O Allah!) and there is no deity worthy of worship except You." Allah brought them back to life after they had perished long ago.

We should state that bringing these people back to life is a clear proof that physical resurrection shall occur on the Day of Resurrection.

This is why Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) said:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ﴾

(Truly, Allah is full of bounty to mankind,)

meaning, in that He shows them His great signs, sound proofs and clear evidences. Yet,

﴿وَلَـكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لاَ يَشْكُرُونَ﴾

(but most men thank not.)

as they do not thank Allah for what He has given them with in their worldly life and religious affairs.

The story of the dead people (2:243 above) also indicates that,

NO CAUTION CAN EVER AVERT DESTINY
AND THAT
THERE IS NO REFUGE FROM ALLAH, BUT TO ALLAH HIMSELF.

These people departed from their land fleeing the epidemic and seeking to enjoy a long life. What they earned was the opposite of what they sought, as death came quickly and instantaneously and seized them all.

There is an authentic Hadith that Imam Ahmad (رحيم الله) reported that `Abdullah ibn `Abbas (رضي الله عنه) said that `Umar ibn Al-Khattab (رضي الله عنه) once went to Ash-Sham (Syria). When he reached the area of Sargh, he was met by the commanders of the army: Abu `Ubaydah bin Jarrah (رضي الله عنه) and his companions. They told him that the plague had broken out in Ash-Sham.

The Hadith then mentioned that `Abdur-Rahman ibn `Awf (رضي الله عنه), who was away attending to some of his affairs, came and said, "I have knowledge regarding this matter.

I heard Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه و سلم) say:

«إِذَا كَانَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَخْرُجُوا فِرَارًا مِنْه،
وإِذَا سَمِعتُمْ به بأَرْضٍ فَلا تَقْدمُوا عَلَيْه»

(If it {the plague} breaks out in a land that you are in, do not leave that land to escape from it. If you hear about it in a land, do not enter it.)

`Umar (رضي الله عنه) then thanked Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) and went back. This Hadith is also reported in the Sahihayn.

(TAKEN FROM TAFSIR IBN KATHIR SURAH AL BAQARAH 2:243)